

**Union reps say clueless over EPF loan scheme**  
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**By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal**

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 7 — The government did not consult the Employees Provident Fund's (EPF) board of employee representatives when it decided to use RM1.5 billion from the EPF to give home loans to unqualified buyers, union officials have said.

Former Sabah Commercial Employees Union (SCEU) general secretary Rebecca Chin, who sat on the EPF board from 2007 to January 31 this year, charged that she was not informed of the new loan scheme during any of the EPF board meetings.

"By convention, we should have been informed. I was a representative of SCEU until January 31, but I was not even aware of this. We were not aware of it until the announcement was made and we had to read it in the newspapers," she told The Malaysian Insider.

Asked whether it was unusual that she was not informed about the new scheme, Chin responded by saying "we know the government system, and how it works... I've yet to be briefed or notified about this."

Her remarks come after Federal Territories and Urban Well-being Minister Raja Datuk Raja Nong Chik Raja Zainal Abidin said last week the government had approached a few potential funders before announcing the project, and that it was the EPF's management that "came forward" to offer to fund the home loan scheme.

But he did not explain why the government did not use its own funds for the loan scheme, saying that the RM1.5 billion would be drawn out from the EPF "in stages".

"What do we know about this scheme? So many questions come to mind... if I am not part of EPF, am I allowed to take out money from EPF?"

"Also, if you are talking about a fund that is supposed to be on a national scale, why is the loan only for people in Kuala Lumpur? What about Sabahans? What is the minimum wage here? We have no money too," Chin said.

"As a representative for Sabah, is this fair for Sabah people?" she said, adding that she wanted to know which stakeholders were consulted before the government announced this loan scheme.

Those on the EPF's board of employee representatives include the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) president Mohd Khalid Atan, National Union of Teaching Profession (NUTP) secretary-general Lok Yim Pheng, Sarawak Bank Employees Union (SBEU) president Hadiah Leen and newly-appointed SCEU general secretary Azlin Awang Chee.

Mohd Khalid (picture) told The Malaysian Insider that the MTUC was not made aware of the loan scheme, and that he "could not recall" the matter being discussed in any of the board meetings with the union representatives.

"It is difficult to comment on this. I was unwell for the better part of last year, and only attended the meetings in June or July. But since then I cannot remember or recall being informed of this plan during any of the meetings.

"It was not deliberated to us... I found out about this when it came out in the newspapers, along with the announcement made by the prime minister," said the MTUC president.

He said the MTUC, which represents 802,323 workers from 390 labour unions, was not invited for a special briefing on the new home loan scheme organised by Raja Nong Chik at the KL City Hall (DBKL) last Friday, and that MTUC was concerned with the sketchy details surrounding the terms of the scheme.

"If this is a loan to the government, there will be some security. But it is not, we do not know the details... EPF has to clarify. We need security.

"Generally, I don't think anyone will be happy without a guarantee of security," Mohd Khalid added.

He said MTUC has scheduled a meeting with the EPF board on February 16.

"We have arranged a meeting to discuss the matter. We want clarification so that we, being employee representatives of EPF, know what is going on."

MTUC had over the weekend slammed the proposed loan scheme, saying that the government was capable of developing housing projects on its own.

The NUTP's Lok however was tight-lipped when asked to comment on the matter, and told The Malaysian Insider she would only speak once she met up with the rest of the EPF board.

Attempts by The Malaysian Insider to contact other EPF board representatives have been unsuccessful so far.

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers have accused Putrajaya of abusing monies from the EPF to hide its current debt levels under the guise of offering a purportedly "noble" housing scheme for lower-income earners.

But PM Datuk Seri Najib Razak said on Friday the use of RM1.5 billion of EPF funds in the home loan scheme will not be detrimental to EPF contributors.

This, he said, was because the amount needed to finance the loan scheme was not big compared to EPF's funds.

Najib said that Raja Nong Chik would be asked to further explain the scheme to the public, adding that it was designed to help the lower-income group who failed to obtain loans from financial institutions to own houses.

Raja Nong Chik himself gave a guarantee earlier that the government would safeguard EPF's interests, saying the deal ensured secure financial returns for the EPF.

He had recently said EPF funds will be used to help some 20,000 people who are still renting in the city to buy homes under the Federal Territories Foundation.

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